

Choptank Tributary Team

About the Watershed:

The Choptank River is the largest river on the Eastern Shore. It drains approximately 700 square miles and covers portions of Dorchester, Talbot, Caroline, and Queen Anne's Counties. The predominant land uses in the watershed are agriculture and forest with growing urban areas in the Towns of Cambridge, Easton, and Denton. The Choptank Team contends with a wide range of issues associated with agriculture and with the growing population in the watershed.

About the Team:

The mission of the Choptank Team is to meet Chesapeake Bay Agreement nutrient and sediment reduction and habitat restoration goals in the Choptank Watershed through partnerships, education, and community participation. The team is a dedicated group of volunteers who are passionate about their river. A large percentage of the members have remained active on the team since its formation in 1995. Members come from a wide range of backgrounds, including farmers, local watershed groups, businesses, and state and county governments. The team generally focuses on seeking legislative and policy change; however, public education and outreach and restoration projects are also important team initiatives.

2001-2002 Recent Accomplishments:

In light of the *Chesapeake 2000 Agreement's* call to revise the nutrient reduction goals and subsequently the Tributary Strategies, the Choptank Team spent much of 2001 and 2002 preparing to develop the new Choptank Tributary Strategy. Jerry Adams served as chair of the team with Robert Wieland as vice-chair from April 2001 through April 2002. In April 2002, Robert Wieland became the team chair with Ken Staver as vice-chair.

The team generally uses its monthly meetings to educate the membership about the current status of the watershed and to identify and further team initiatives. Major meeting topics in 2001 included Total Maximum Daily Loads in the Choptank Watershed, the Upper Choptank Watershed Restoration Action Strategy, achieving oyster sanctuary status, growth and its impacts on water quality, and impervious surface impacts. During 2002, the team focused its meetings on revising the Choptank Tributary Strategy. Theme-related meetings were held on such topics as point sources, air deposition, septic systems, stormwater, and agriculture to identify nutrient reduction implementation opportunities and to refine the team's workplan.

- ✳ Recognizing the many nutrient and sediment reduction benefits associated with cover crops, the Choptank Team instigated a statewide Tributary Team effort to seek legislation change for Maryland's cover crop program. Through letters and meetings with the Governor, state legislators, and the Chesapeake Bay Cabinet in 2001 and 2002, the team sought to increase funding for the Eastern Shore cover crop program and to establish a statewide program. Although the program was expanded statewide in 2002 and received a funding increase, the team plans to continue to seek full statewide coverage.
- ✳ During 2001 and 2002, the Choptank Team sought to establish Trappe Creek as an oyster sanctuary and protect the team's oyster and submerged aquatic vegetation restoration sites. Members met several times with representatives from the Oyster Recovery Partnership, the Talbot Tongers, and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to negotiate the proposal. In May 2002, the parties established an agreement whereby the upper two-thirds of

the creek received sanctuary status while the lower one-third of the creek received reserve status. The proposal went into effect in October 2002.

- ✱ The Choptank Team's Wade-In has become the team's major public outreach and education event. Senator Bernie Fowler established wade-ins to raise awareness about water clarity and local tributaries. Participants measure water clarity by wearing white sneakers and wading into the water until they can no longer see their feet. The Choptank Wade-In is held at the Strand in Oxford on the third Saturday in June in conjunction with the Boat Bums International Cardboard Boat Races to benefit the Maryland Special Olympics. To engage elected officials in the team's activities, members invited elected officials to help lead the wade-in in 2001 and 2002. Congressman Wayne Gilchrest, Senator Richard Colburn, Delegate Adelaide Eckardt, Talbot Council Member Hilary Spence, and Dorchester Commissioner Tom Flowers have responded to the team's call and participated in the wade-in and the cardboard boat races. With each wade-in, the team saw improvements in water quality to all time highs of 44 inches in 2001 and 47 inches in 2002.
- ✱ At the team's February 8, 2001 meeting, Trappe Creek Watershed resident Don Kerstetter gave a presentation to the team about his efforts to convert his farm into the Trappe Landing Farm and Native Sanctuary – a public foundation committed to the restoration of Trappe Creek. Since this presentation, Don has become an active team member and engaged the team in a number of his efforts. These efforts included removing exotic plants and trees, surrounding farms fields with meadow and tree buffers, and installing a wetland treatment structure on each farm water lead. Kerstetter has also worked to encourage other farmers and neighbors in the watershed to implement Bay-friendly farming practices. In 2002, Kerstetter hosted a meeting with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and area homeowners to establish an oyster gardening program for Trappe Creek. He has also established a partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Maces Landing Middle School to grow and plant wetland plants on the sanctuary.
- ✱ At the February 8, 2001 team meeting, the Chesapeake Bay Trust awarded \$42,000 to a Bay grass partnership consisting of the Horn Point Environmental Laboratory, the Choptank Tributary Team, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, DNR, the Eastern Shore of Maryland Education Consortium, and the Talbot and Dorchester County Soil Conservation Districts. The goal of this effort was to conduct mesohaline submerged aquatic vegetation projects in the Choptank River. Once the project was funded, four sites were identified in the Choptank watershed for the Bay grass restoration – one of which was a site in Trappe Creek adjacent to the team's oyster bar. In April 2001, Horn Point scientists conducted a pilot citizens' program whereby volunteers were trained and equipped to grow the grasses in their homes. This pilot project was followed by a teacher workshop in October 2001 and another citizen workshop in February 2002. In the spring of 2002, the volunteers helped the Horn Point scientists plant the grasses they had grown at the four sites. A total of nine quadrats, equaling 100 square meters, were planted between the four sites.
- ✱ On July 26, 2001, several Choptank Team members participated in the Tributary Team New Member Picnic, which was held at the Horsehead Wetlands Center in Grasonville. This membership drive was coordinated through the Tributary Strategies Program for all 10 of

Maryland's Tributary Teams. More than 50 people attended, and the Choptank Team established several new potential member contacts.

- ✳ In 2001, Talbot and Caroline Counties were awarded a grant by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to prepare an Upper Choptank Watershed Restoration Action Strategy (WRAS). The WRAS is a partnership between the counties and the state to assess the watershed, identify problem areas, and to develop a restoration strategy. Several Choptank Team members are participating in the strategy development and the team plans to assist with the strategy's implementation once it is finalized.
- ✳ Throughout 2001 and 2002, Choptank Team members participated on the Public Drainage Task Force – a workgroup established by the Chesapeake Bay Cabinet in 1999 to advise the state on the best methods to maintain drainage and to enhance the environment on the Eastern Shore. Team Member David Harris participates on the task force and is conducting a demonstration project with a new wiper bar technology for the group. The wiper bar is attached to a tractor and can be targeted to only strike trees along a ditch and cut an herbicide into them. This best management practice maintains the integrity of the ditch bank and provides some three-dimensional growth along it.
- ✳ On June 14, 2001, then-Chair Jerry Adams arranged for the team to take a bus tour of the Denton and Easton wastewater treatment plants. All of the Eastern Shore Tributary Teams and the state contacts to the Tributary Teams were invited to participate on the tour. The participants learned about the Denton plant's activated sludge process with nitrogen conversion and phosphorus removal by chemical precipitation. Then, they went to the Easton plant to see how the plant's overland flow system and sanitary sewer rehabilitation project are working to meet its effluent limitations.
- ✳ In November 2001, the Choptank Team reviewed and commented upon a draft brochure that was designed to educate the public about the importance of the menhaden fishery. The team also sent a letter to the Chesapeake Bay Trust in support of a Pioneer Grant proposal to pay for the printing of the brochure.
- ✳ On March 22, 2002, the Choptank Team sent a letter to the Maryland House of Delegates Ways and Means Committee and Environmental Matters Committee in support of amendments to House Bill 1187. The amendment would increase boater registration fees to achieve *Chesapeake 2000 Agreement* commitments for outreach and education and underwater grass restoration goals.
- ✳ On April 16, 2002, several Choptank Team members attended the Watershed Model 101 workshop, which was held at Adkins Arboretum. The Tributary Strategies Development Workgroup held this free workshop to teach the Tributary Teams about the model and to show how it is used to develop the Chesapeake Bay goals.
- ✳ On May 16, 2003, Maryland's Tributary Team's met with the Governor and his Bay Cabinet. On behalf of all of the teams, the Choptank Team addressed the need for more funding and support for cover crops on the Eastern Shore and the need to establish a statewide program.

The team also asked the Governor's assistance in designating Trappe Creek as an oyster sanctuary and studying the results of setting aside an entire estuary for oyster restoration. Other topics discussed at the meeting included stormwater, the Water Quality Improvement Act, and Living Shorelines.

- ✱ On July 1, 2002, the team sent a letter to the director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Chesapeake Bay Program, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the commissioner of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission, and the executive director of the Atlantic States marine Fisheries Commission to encourage the development of a Fisheries Management Plan for Atlantic menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay.
- ✱ On July 29, 2002, Choptank Team members and their guests went on a boat cruise of the Choptank River aboard the "Aquarius" – the University of Maryland's research vessel. The evening included dinner, discussions with university researchers, and a first hand look at the Choptank's aquatic life.
- ✱ On December 10, 2002, the team hosted a public meeting at the Easton Welcome Center to review the draft Town Creek and Trappe Creek Total Maximum Daily Loads. Approximately 15 people attended the meeting to learn about and discuss the proposed regulations with Maryland Department of the Environment representatives.

2003 Priorities:

Revising the Choptank Tributary Strategy with the latest nutrient and sediment reduction and habitat restoration goals is the Choptank Team's principle priority for 2003. The team plans to continue to invite experts to team meetings to review the major nutrient pollution sources in the Choptank watershed, assess the significance of each source, determine what is being done to reduce loadings from the sources, and identify what the team can do to meet the new reduction goals with respect to each pollution source. As the new Choptank Tributary Strategy is drafted and finalized, the team will host public meetings in the summer and fall of 2003 to invite the public to comment on the draft strategy and to become a member on the team.

To prepare the public for the new strategy, the team plans to write a series of articles about the Choptank Watershed for local newspapers to publish. The purpose of these articles will be to increase public awareness of the water quality problems in the Choptank, educate the public about the role of the Choptank Tributary Team and state agencies in addressing the problems, and identify the implications of the nutrient cap and Total Maximum Daily Loads on the economic life in the watershed.

Another major goal of the team will be to educate and engage the new Governor and administration in the Tributary Strategy effort and to meet with local elected officials to seek their support in implementing Choptank Team priorities. As a part of this, the team plans to work with the Upper Eastern and Lower Eastern Shore Teams to write a letter to the Eastern Shore Delegation asking to meet with them during the 2003 legislative session to discuss Bay priorities for the Eastern Shore.

The team award recognizes the team member who has made significant contributions to the team and the watershed. Team members and participants nominate the awardee and final determinations are made by the chair and vice-chair of the team. The awardee receives a Governor's citation at the annual meeting and press releases of their award and contributions are distributed to their local and state newspapers.

2001 Team Awardee

At the 6th Annual Tributary Team Meeting held on February 23, 2002, Don Kerstetter was awarded the 2001 Choptank Team Award. Don was nominated by his fellow team members for his actions as a concerned citizen to protect La Trappe Creek by spending his life savings to turn his 34-acre retirement haven into the Trappe Landing Farm and Native Sanctuary – an ecologically friendly working farm that will educate others about wise land use practices. Don was also recognized for his work to educate and engage all 84 other landowners along the creek in the effort to help improve their local water quality.

2002 Team Awardee

David Harris was the recipient of the 2002 Choptank Tributary Team Award at the 7th Annual Tributary Team Meeting held on February 1, 2003. David was recognized for his overall commitment to the Choptank Team and for being an active farming representative on the team since its inception. David was also awarded for helping to create and participate in the Public Drainage Association Task Force to identify effective solutions to public drainage ditch issues. The team also recognized David for selflessly promoting ditch maintenance practices that have the least nutrient and sediment inputs into waterways even though these practices reduce the demand for his ditch maintenance business.

For More Information:

For more information, contact Susan Phelps Larcher, team coordinator, at 410-260-8832. You can also visit our website at www.dnr.state.md.us/bay/tribstrat/.

